

**How to Reach a Million Students:
Teaching Egyptology Online
Nicole B. Hansen
Glyphdoctors.com**

Introduction: People all over the world want to decipher the secrets of ancient Egypt themselves by reading the original hieroglyphs. Because there are few readily accessible and affordable institutions offering such courses, some have tried teaching themselves but gave up because they had no one to answer their questions and no other students with whom to learn. These students have found Glyphdoctors to be the ideal solution for their needs.

Since the course started in April 2006, Glyphdoctors online hieroglyphs course provides learners from all over the world (nearly 80 students from 13 countries so far) with a complete introduction to Middle Egyptian grammar, giving them the skills needed to comprehend and translate literary, religious, historical and documentary texts in the language. The full course is divided into three units and is equivalent in the material covered to a first-year university level hieroglyphs course. Students can enroll at any time and are allowed up to six months to complete each unit at their own pace, with time extensions available for a small fee. This is of benefit to busy students, many of whom work or are enrolled in universities full-time. They gain access to a virtual classroom where they have the guidance of Egyptologist Nicole Hansen and are able to interact with other students.

Just a few years ago, to put together such a course would have required an investment of hundreds of thousands of dollars for hardware, software and salaries. It would have only been possible through an academic institution. However, open source software made it logistically possible for one individual to independently and single-handedly develop the site and course material with no budget while finishing a Ph.D. dissertation (to be defended on Monday afternoon-now you understand why I look so tired!) and initially while learning useful and relevant skills while employed by two of the most famous Egyptological projects in Egypt (as database editor for the Theban Mapping Project and as digital conversion specialist and archive manager for the Giza Plateau Mapping Project). The Glyphdoctors site is constructed using Moodle, an open source course management system that was customized for the needs of the course.

It consists of the following sections:

Nicole's Notebook: These notes, prepared by Glyphdoctors' Nicole Hansen, include additional information, alternative suggestions, and learning tips that help the student master the various aspects of Egyptian grammar and script. They are available in an online book that also can be easily printed for offline use.

Online Submission of Exercises: Students submit their homework exercises through an easy-to-use Web interface. They are reviewed by the instructor, who marks corrections and offers personally tailored suggestions for improving translation skills. Contextual information about the texts they are translating will also be provided. All students who have completed the first unit of the course so far have succeeded extremely well on these exercises (with grades of 95% and above).

Question and Answer Forums: In other distance learning courses on hieroglyphs, students must study alone, without easy access to their instructors. At Glyphdoctors, they are able to ask questions regarding grammatical and cultural concepts introduced in the course, get answers from the instructor, and help one another.

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Soundclips: By listening to their instructor, students learn how Egyptian letters may have sounded and how Egyptian words and sentences are conventionally pronounced by Egyptologists. Students say this helps them immensely in learning vocabulary of this dead language because having an audio cue facilitates memorization of the phonetic values of words that otherwise are only represented with hieroglyphs.

Glyph Gallery: The goal of this feature is to help students learn to recognize and draw individual hieroglyphs. It tells them how a particular sign is used and what it represents. It is illustrated with relevant images and an animated sequence of how to draw the glyph.

Vocabulary Builders: Electronic flash cards accompany each lesson to assist students in mastering vocabulary. Alternatively, printable vocabulary lists allow them to study vocabulary anywhere and help them to complete the exercises associated with each lesson.

Learning Links: An annotated database of other Web sites that students can visit to supplement their learning is available. In addition, as various cultural topics are introduced in the textbooks, additional Web sites on these subjects will be recommended so they can broaden their knowledge of Egyptian culture. Students are able to rate, comment on, and add to the learning link database themselves.

Wiki: One of the best ways of learning is explaining what one has learned to others. To help consolidate their understanding of Egyptian, students are helping to create a comprehensive wiki to accompany the lessons.

Hieroglyphs Editor and Transliteration: A built-in hieroglyphs editor allows students to type hieroglyphs in their homework and forum posts, while helping them to memorize the signs. Transliteration of hieroglyphs is also possible using a Firefox extension.

Open Source Software Used to Prepare and Deliver the Course:

Moodle: Course management system <http://www.moodle.org>

Audacity: Audio recorder used to record soundclips <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

Draw SWF: Software for creating Flash animations from drawings
<http://drawswf.sourceforge.net/>

WikiHiero: Hieroglyphic editor adapted and enhanced for use in the course <http://aoineko.free.fr/>

Russ Key: Firefox extension adapted for typing Egyptian transliteration
<http://russkey.mozdev.org/>

Future Plans for Glyphdoctors.com: The hieroglyphs course is only the beginning. In the future, Glyphdoctors will take advantage of the ever expanding freely available Web resources and offer other courses in other stages of the Egyptian language and in Egyptology. Ultimately, it is hoped that most of these courses will be taught by other Egyptologists, providing work opportunities to an underemployed group of academics in the area where there is the most demand and interest in their expertise, the public realm.